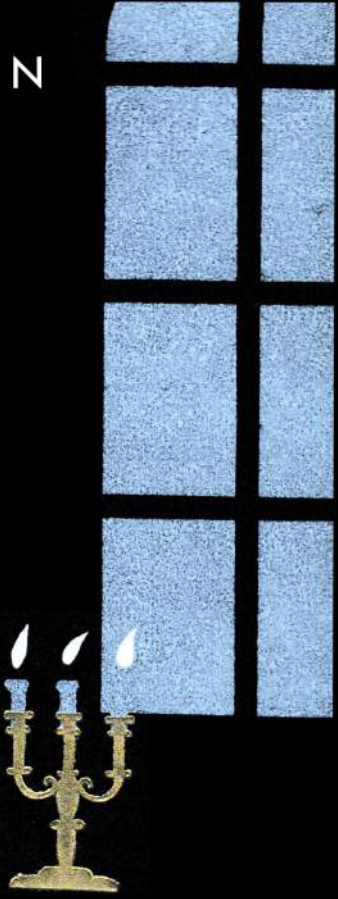
A. S. PUSHKIN



The queen of spades

The name of Pushkin immediately suggests the idea of a Russian national poet. And in truth not one of our poets stands higher than he, or is more entitled to be called national. This right is entirely his. In his works, as in a lexicon may be found all the wealth, power and expressiveness of our language. More than any other he it was who expanded its outlines and displayed it in all its spaciousness. Pushkin is a remarkable phenomenon.... In him the Russian countryside, the Russian soul, the Russian language, the Russian temperament are reflected with the purity, the transparent beauty in which landscape is reflected on the convex surface of an optical lens.

N. Gogol

CLASSICS
OF
RUSSIAN
LITERATURE

АЛЕКСАНДР ПУШКИН

ПИКОВАЯ ДАМА

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ
ЯЗЫКАХ

МОСКВА

Alexander Pushkin

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY IVY AND TATYANA LITVINOV

ILLUSTRATED BY V. SVESHNIKOV

DESIGNED BY B. MARKEVICH

The Queen of Spades
stands for secret enmity.

LATEST BOOK OF DREAMS

I

CARD-PLAYING was going on in the quarters of Narumov, an officer in the Horse Guards. The long winter night passed imperceptibly; it was five in the morning when they sat down to supper. Those who had won, plied their forks eagerly; the rest sat in front of their empty plates with an air of abstraction. But champagne was set on the table, the talk became lively, and all took part in it.

"How did you get on, Surin?" asked the host.

"Lost as usual. It must be admitted that I am unlucky. I play for low stakes, I never get excited, always keep my head, and yet I lose all the time."

"And are you never tempted? Don't you ever long to raise the stakes on a card? Your firmness amazes me."

"Look at Hermann!" said one of the guests, pointing to a young officer from an engineer regiment. "Never picked up a card his whole life, never doubled a stake, and sits beside us till five o'clock, watching our play!"

"I take a great interest in cards," said Hermann, "but I am not in a position to sacrifice what is necessary in the hope of gaining what is superfluous."

"Hermann's a Teuton, and therefore cautious—that's all!" remarked Tomsky. "Now, my grandmother, Countess Anna Fedotovna—she's an enigma, if there ever was one."

"What? What's that?" cried the guests.

"I can't understand," continued Tomsky, "how it is that my grandmother never gambles."

"What is there remarkable about an eighty-year-old woman not wanting to gamble?" said Narumov.

"D'you mean to say you don't know anything about her?"

"Nothing whatsoever. Upon my word!"

"Then let me tell you."

"You must know that my grandmother, sixty years ago, visited Paris, and was all the fashion there. People followed her about to have a look at *la Vénus Moscovite*; Richelieu paid her court, and my grandmother vows that her cruelty almost drove him to suicide.

"In those days ladies used to play faro. One day, while playing cards at court, she incurred a debt of honour for a great sum of money to the Duc d'Orleans. When she got home, my grandmother, while removing the patches off her face, and slipping out of her hooped skirt, recounted her losses

to my grandfather, and ordered him to pay up.

"My late grandfather, as far as I can remember, was a kind of steward to my grandmother. He feared her like the plague; but when he heard of such appalling losses he flew into a rage, took up the abacus and proved to her that they had spent half a million during the last six months, that they had no Moscow or Saratov estates in the neighbourhood of Paris, and flatly refused to pay. My grandmother gave him a box on the ears, and banished him from her bedroom, as a token of her disfavour.

"The next day she sent for her husband, hoping that the domestic chastisement would have had its effect on him, but she found him adamant. For the first time in their married life she condescended to argument and explanations. She tried to shame him by pointing out condescendingly that there were debts and debts, and that there was a difference between a prince and a coach-maker. Useless! My grandfather rebelled. He said no, and his 'no'

must be final. My grandmother was at her wits' end.

"Among her intimates was a very remarkable individual. You have heard of Comte St. Germain, of whom such extraordinary tales are told. You know he gave himself out to be the Eternal Jew, the discoverer of the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone, and so on. People laughed at him as a charlatan, and Casanova wrote in his Memoirs that he was a spy; despite his mysterious reputation, however, St. Germain had a most respectable appearance and knew how to make himself agreeable in society. My grandmother loves him to distraction to this day, and will not allow him to be spoken of disrespectfully. She knew St. Germain had a great amount of money at his disposal, and, deciding to have recourse to his aid, sent him a note asking him to come to her at once.

"The old eccentric responded to her summons immediately and found my grandmother overcome with grief. She

painted in the darkest colours her husband's cruelty, and ended by declaring that her only hope was in St. Germain's friendship and chivalry.

"St. Germain pondered. 'I could let you have this sum,' he said, 'but I know you would never have any peace until you had paid me back, and I should not like to cause you fresh cares. There is another means—you can win it back.'

" 'But my dear Count,' replied my grandmother, 'I tell you we have no money at all.' 'You will not need money,' said the Count. 'Be so kind as to hear me out.' And he told her a secret which any one of us would pay dear to know. . . ."

The youthful gamblers redoubled their attention. Tomsky lit his pipe, inhaled the smoke, and continued:

"That same night my grandmother appeared at Versailles, *au jeu de la Reine*. The Duc d'Orleans dealt. My grandmother gave some slight apology for not having brought the money for her debt, inventing a little story in her justification, and began

playing against him. She selected three cards, which she played one after another—all three proved to be winning cards, and my grandmother won back the whole of her debt."

"A mere fluke!" said one of the guests.

"A fairy-tale," said Hermann.

"Perhaps the cards were marked," put in another.

"Hardly," replied Tomsky with dignity.

"What!" said Narumov. "You have a grandmother who can play three winning cards running, and you have not yet been able to discover the secret of these cabalistics!"

"It's not so simple, devil take it!" replied Tomsky. "She had four sons, of whom one was my father. All four were desperate gamblers, and she did not disclose her secret to any of them, although this would have been no bad thing for them—nor for me either, for that matter. But this is what my uncle, Count Ivan Ilyich, told me, on his word of honour. The late Chaplitsky, that same Chaplitsky who died in poverty,

having squandered millions, once lost about three hundred thousand rubles in his youth—to Zorich, I think. He was in despair. My grandmother, who was always very hard on the vagaries of young men, for some reason took pity on Chaplitsky. She named three cards to him, which he was to play in succession, but extorted from him the promise, on his word of honour, never to gamble any more. Chaplitsky went to the rooms of his fortunate opponent, and they sat down to the card-table. Chaplitsky staked fifty thousand on the first card and won; then he doubled and redoubled the stake, and won back his losses, with a generous margin. . . .

"But it's time to go to bed—it's a quarter to six." Indeed it was getting light already—the young men finished what was in their glasses and dispersed.

— *Il paraît que monsieur est décidément pour les suivantes.*
— *Que voulez-vous, madame? Elles sont plus fraîches.*

SOCIETY TALK

II

THE OLD COUNTESS*** was sitting in her tiring-room in front of her mirror. Three serving-maids hovered around her. One held a pot of rouge, another a box of hairpins, and the third a high cap with flame-coloured ribbons. The Countess, who had not the slightest pretensions to beauty, which had long faded, nevertheless

preserved all the habits of her youth, adhering strictly to the fashions of the 1770's, and spending as much time and energy over her toilet as she had done sixty years before. Seated before a tambour at the window was a young lady, the Countess's companion.

"Good morning, Grand'maman!" said a young officer who had just come into the room. "*Bonjour, Mademoiselle Lise.* I have come to ask a favour of you, Grand'maman."

"What is it, Paul?"

"Permit me to introduce a friend of mine to you, and to bring him to your ball on Friday."

"Bring him straight to the ball, you can introduce him to me there. Were you at the ***'s yesterday?"

"Oh, yes! It was very gay. We danced till five. Eletskaya was exquisite."

"Eh, my dear! What can you see in her? You should have seen her grandmother, the Princess Darya Petrovna! She must be

very old now, I suppose—the Princess Darya Petrovna."

"Old?" replied Tomsky absently. "She's been dead these seven years."

The young lady at the window raised her head and made a sign to the young man. He remembered that the death of her contemporaries was always kept from the old Countess, and bit his lip. But the Countess received this information, which was news to her, with the utmost indifference.

"Dead!" she repeated. "And I did not know! We became maids of honour at the same time, and when we were presented, the Empress. . . ."

And the Countess told her story to her grandson for the hundredth time.

"Well, Paul," she said, after a pause. "Now help me to get up. Lise, where's my snuff-box?"

And the Countess retired behind a screen, accompanied by her maids, to finish her toilet. Tomsky remained with the young lady.

"Whom do you wish to introduce to her?" asked Lisaveta Ivanovna in low tones.

"Narumov. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he a military or a civilian?"

"Military."

"An engineer?"

"No. A cavalryman. What made you think he was an engineer?"

The girl gave a short laugh, but answered not a word.

"Paul!" cried the Countess from behind the screen. "Send me a new novel, but not a modern one, if you please."

"What do you mean, Grand'maman?"

"I mean a novel in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which there are no drowned bodies. I have a perfect horror of drowned bodies!"

"There are no such novels, nowadays. Unless, of course, you would like a Russian novel."

"Are there any Russian novels? Send me one, Sir, by all means, send me one!"

"I must say good-bye to you, Grand'ma-

man. I am pressed for time. Good-bye, Lisaveta Ivanovna. What made you think Narumov was an engineer?"

And Tomsky went out of the tiring-room.

Lisaveta Ivanovna remained alone—she turned from her embroidery and began looking out of the window. Very soon a young officer made his appearance round the corner on the other side of the street. A blush covered her cheeks; she took up her work again, bending her head low over the canvas. Just then the Countess reappeared, fully dressed.

"Order the carriage, Lisanka," she said. "We'll go for a drive."

Lise rose from the embroidery frame and began putting away her work.

"Are you deaf, Child?" cried the Countess. "Order the carriage instantly!"

"Yes, Grand'maman," said the girl softly, and went quickly into the entrance hall.

A servant entered with some books for the Countess from Prince Pavel Alexandrovich.

"Very good. Give him my thanks," said the Countess. "Lise! Lise! Where are you going?"

"To dress."

"There's plenty of time, Child! Stay where you are! Open the first volume. Read to me. . . ."

The girl picked up the book and read a few lines.

"Louder!" said the Countess. "What's the matter with you, my dear? Have you lost your voice? Wait a minute—give me a footstool. Nearer, can't you?"

Lisaveta Ivanovna read two more pages. The Countess yawned.

"Put the book down," she said. "A lot of nonsense! Send it back to Prince Pavel with my thanks. Well, where's the carriage?"

"The carriage is ready," said Lisaveta Ivanovna, glancing out of the window.

"And why aren't you dressed?" said the Countess. "You always keep me waiting. It's intolerable, my dear!"

Lise ran to her room. Before two minutes had passed the Countess began ringing her bell with all her might. The three maids came running in at one door, and the footman at the other.

"Can't you come when you're called?" exclaimed the Countess. "Tell Lisaveta Ivanovna I'm waiting for her."

Lisaveta Ivanovna came in, in her cloak and hat.

"At last!" said the Countess. "How you're dressed up! What for, I wonder? Whom do you want to conquer? What's the weather like? It seems to be windy."

"Not at all, Your Highness. It's very still weather," replied the footman.

"You always say the first thing that comes into your head. Open the *fortochka.** There, I knew there was a wind, and a very cold one, too! Send away the carriage. We're not going, Lise. You needn't have dressed yourself up."

* Small ventilation pane in window.—*Tr.*

"And this is my life!" thought Lisaveta Ivanovna.

In truth, Lisaveta Ivanovna was a most unhappy creature. The bread of charity is bitter, said Dante, and the steps to a stranger's house are steep, and who knows that bitterness so well as a poor girl dependent on an aristocratic old dame? The Countess*** did not really have a bad disposition, but she was capricious, like all women who have once been the spoilt darlings of society, and she was stingy, completely absorbed in her cold selfishness, like all old people who, having expended their tenderer emotions during a long lifetime, feel that they do not belong to the present. She participated in all the vanities of high society, dragging herself to balls, where, seated in a corner, rouged and dressed according to the fashion of ancient days, she was the hideous and essential ornament of the ballroom; newly-arrived guests went up to her and bowed low, as though in obedience to an established ritual, after which nobody took any notice of her. In her own home she

received the whole town, observing the strictest etiquette, though she did not recognize any of her guests. Her innumerable household, growing fat and grey in her hall and in the servants' quarters, did whatever they liked and vied with one another in plundering the dying old woman. Lisaveta Ivanovna was a domestic martyr. She poured out tea and was scolded for the waste of sugar; she read novels aloud and was held guilty for all the author's shortcomings; she accompanied the old lady on her drives, and had to answer for the weather and the state of the road. She was allotted a salary which she never received in full; and was expected to be dressed like everyone else, which is to say like very few. In society she played the most pitiable role. Everyone knew her and no one took any notice of her; at balls, she only danced when a *vis-à-vis* was needed, and the ladies took her arm whenever they had to retire in order to set to rights some detail of their toilet. Sensitive and therefore fully alive to her position, she was always on the look-

out for the deliverer she awaited so impatiently. But the young men, vain and calculating, did not honour her with their attention, although Lisaveta Ivanovna was infinitely more attractive than the cold, arrogant maidens upon whom they danced attendance. How many times, noiselessly departing from the dull, luxurious drawing-room, did she retire to weep in her humble chamber, with its wall-papered screen, its chest of drawers, its little mirror and painted bedstead, in which a tallow candle in a brass candlestick burned dimly!

Once—a day or two after the evening described in the beginning of this tale, and a week before the scene just enacted—Lisaveta Ivanovna, seated before her tambour at the window, happened to glance into the street, and caught sight of a young man in the uniform of an engineer regiment standing motionless, his eyes fixed on her window. She lowered her head and resumed her work; five minutes later she looked out again—the young officer was still there. Not being in the habit of flirting

with passing officers, she stopped looking out of the window and went on stitching for another two hours or so without raising her head. Dinner was served. Rising, she began to put away her tambour and, glancing out of the window, observed that the officer was still there. This struck her as somewhat strange. After dinner she went to the window with uneasy feelings, but the officer was no longer there—and she forgot about him....

Two days later, while going out with the Countess to get into the carriage, she saw him again. He was standing right at the porch, his beaver collar turned up to hide his face—a pair of black eyes gleamed from beneath his cap. Lisaveta Ivanovna was alarmed, she knew not why, and seated herself in the carriage with inexplicable trepidation.

As soon as she returned home she ran to the window—the officer was standing in his former place, his eyes fixed on her; she moved away, tortured by curiosity and an agitation which was quite new to her.

From that time, not a day passed without the young man appearing beneath the windows of their house at a certain hour. A curious relationship sprang up between them. While seated at her work she would feel his approach and raise her head, her glance resting on him for a longer space of time every day. The young man seemed to be beholden to her for this; with the keen sight of youth, she saw the instant blush which covered his pale cheeks whenever their eyes met. A week later, and she was greeting him with a smile....

When Tomsky asked permission to introduce his friend to the Countess, the poor girl's heart began to beat. But when she learned that Narumov was not an engineer but a horse-guardsman she regretted that, by her indiscreet question, she had given away her secret to the volatile Tomsky.

Hermann was the son of a Russianized German who had left him a very small fortune. Firmly convinced of the necessity of consolidating his independence, Hermann did not even touch the interest from

it, and lived exclusively on his pay, never allowing himself the slightest indulgences. He was, however, reserved and ambitious, and his comrades seldom had occasion to laugh at his excessive thriftiness. He was a man of strong passions and a fiery imagination, but his firmness of character saved him from the usual errors of youth. Thus, while by nature a gambler, he never played cards, calculating that his fortune was not such as to allow him (to use his own words) *to sacrifice the necessary in the hope of gaining the superfluous*, and yet he would sit beside the card-tables all night long, following with feverish excitement the vicissitudes of the game.

The story of the three cards affected his imagination powerfully, and he could not get it out of his head all night. "Supposing," he said to himself, roaming the streets of Petersburg the next night, "supposing the old Countess were to reveal her secret to me? Supposing she were to tell me the names of those three infallible cards? Why should I not try my luck? Present myself

to her, get into her favour—perhaps become her lover . . . but all this would take time, and she is eighty-seven, she might die next week, the day after tomorrow! And the story itself—is it to be believed? No! Caution, moderation and diligence—these are my three faithful cards, with these I will treble my fortune, increase it sevenfold, achieve tranquillity and independence."

Thus meditating, he found himself in one of the principal streets of Petersburg, before a house of ancient architecture. The street was thronged with carriages, which were still rolling up one after another to the brilliantly lighted porch. The slender foot of some young belle, a jackboot with jingling spurs, the striped stocking and the slipper of an ambassador, were thrust in rapid succession from the carriage doors. Furred mantles and cloaks flashed past the majestic footman. Hermann came to a standstill.

"Whose house is this?" Hermann asked the gendarme at the corner.

"The Countess***'s," replied the latter.

Hermann was thrown into trepidation. The marvellous story again rose before the eye of his fancy. He began walking up and down in front of the house, thinking of its mistress and her miraculous power. It was late when he returned to his humble dwelling; he lay awake a long time, and when sleep overcame him he dreamed of cards, the baize-covered table, heaps of notes, piles of golden coins. He staked one card after another, firmly doubled the stakes, won repeatedly, scraped the gold towards him, pocketed the notes. He awoke late, sighing for the loss of his fantastic riches, and once more went to roam the city, once more found himself in front of the Countess's mansion. It was as if some mysterious force had drawn him to it. He stood still and looked up at the windows. Behind one of them he saw a dark head bent either over a book or work. The head was lifted. Hermann saw a youthful face and black eyes. This moment decided his fate.

Vous m'écrivez, mon ange, des lettres de quatre pages plus vite que je ne puis les lire.

CORRESPONDENCE

III

HARDLY HAD LISAVETA IVANOVNA taken off her cloak and hat, when the Countess sent for her and ordered the carriage to be brought round again. And so they went out of the house to get into it. Just at the moment when two footmen were half-lifting, half-pushing the old dame through the carriage door, Lisaveta Ivanovna saw her

engineer standing close to the wheels. He seized her hand; she was almost stupefied with terror; the young man vanished—a letter remained in her hand. She hid it inside her glove and neither saw nor heard anything during the whole drive. It was the Countess's habit to fire off question after question when in the carriage—Who's that, just gone by? What bridge is that? What's written on that sign? This time Lisaveta Ivanovna answered at random, and her meaningless remarks angered the Countess.

"What's come over you, my dear? Have you had a stroke all of a sudden? Don't you hear me, or is it that you don't understand what I say?... I don't lisp, thank the Lord, and I am still in possession of my wits!"

Lisaveta Ivanovna in very truth was not listening. As soon as she got back she hastened to her room and drew the missive out of her glove—it was unsealed. Lisaveta Ivanovna ran her eye over it. The letter contained professions of love: it was tender and respectful, copied word-for-word from

a German novel. But Lisaveta Ivanovna, who did not know German, was enchanted with the letter.

The letter she had received nevertheless caused her excessive agitation. It was the first time she had entered upon secret, intimate relations with a young man. His audacity appalled her. She reproached herself with indiscreet behaviour, and could not make up her mind what to do. Should she stop sitting at the window and cool the officer's desire for further pursuit by displaying indifference? Ought she to send him back his letter, or, perhaps, answer it coldly and decisively? There was no one for her to consult—she had neither friends nor counsellors. Lisaveta Ivanovna made up her mind to reply.

She sat down at her little writing-table, got out pen and paper, and fell to musing. She began her letter several times, tearing it up each time—her words seemed to her either too indulgent, or too severe. At last she succeeded in writing a few lines with which she could be satisfied: "I am confi-

dent," she wrote, "that your intentions are honourable and that you would not wish to insult me by a thoughtless act; but our acquaintance must not begin in this wise. I return you your letter and trust that in future I shall have no cause to complain of unmerited disrespect."

The next day, as soon as she saw Hermann approaching, Lisaveta Ivanovna rose from her tambour, went into the adjoining room, opened the *fortochka* and tossed her letter out of the window, relying on the young officer's dexterity. Hermann ran to the spot where the letter had fallen, picked it up and entered the shop of a pastry cook. Breaking the seal, he found his own letter and the reply of Lisaveta Ivanovna. It was what he had expected and he went home deeply absorbed in his intrigue.

Three days after this, a sharp-eyed girl from a milliner's shop brought Lisaveta Ivanovna a note.

Lisaveta Ivanovna opened it anxiously, fearing it might be a dun, when she suddenly recognized Hermann's handwriting.

"You've made a mistake, Child," she said. "This note is not for me."

"It is, it is! It's for you," answered the bold girl, not troubling to conceal a sly smile. "Be so good as to read it."

Lisaveta Ivanovna ran her eye hastily over the note. Hermann demanded an interview.

"You must be mistaken, my girl," said Lisaveta Ivanovna, alarmed both by the precipitancy of the demand, and the means employed by Hermann. "This letter is probably not intended for me." And she tore it into fragments.

"If it's not for you then why did you tear it up?" said the shop-girl. "I could have given it back to the person who sent it."

"I would ask you not to bring me any more notes, for the future, Child," said Lisaveta Ivanovna, flushing at the girl's remark. "And tell the person who sent you that he ought to be ashamed of himself. . . ."

But Hermann did not desist from his efforts. Lisaveta Ivanovna received letters from him daily, through various channels.

They were no longer translated from German. Hermann wrote them under the inspiration of passion, and used language which was natural to him—his letters expressed both his unwavering desire and the chaos of his unbridled imagination. Lisaveta Ivanovna no longer attempted to return them to him, she revelled in them; she began answering them, and her notes became longer and more tender with every day. At last she threw the following letter out of the window to him:

"There is a ball at the*** Embassy tonight. The Countess will be there. We shall be there till two o'clock. This would be your chance to see me alone. As soon as the Countess leaves, her servants are sure to go away; there will be only the doorman in the porch, and he usually goes into his own little room. Come at half-past eleven. Go straight upstairs. If you find anyone in the hall, ask for the Countess. They'll tell you she isn't at home, and there will be nothing for you to do, but go. But you will probably meet no one. The maids stay in their own

room, all together. From the hall, turn to the left and go straight on till you get to the Countess's bedroom. There you will see a screen in front of two little doors. The one on the right leads to the study, where the Countess never goes. The one on the left leads to a passage, from which there is a narrow spiral staircase to my room."

Hermann awaited the appointed time, like a tiger ready to pounce. By ten o'clock he had already taken up his position in front of the Countess's house. The weather was atrocious, the wind howled and snow fell in moist flakes. The lamps burned dimly, the streets were deserted. Every now and then a cabby drove his lean hack by, in the hope of picking up a belated wayfarer. Hermann had nothing on over his frock-coat, but was conscious neither of wind nor snow. At last the Countess's carriage was brought round. Hermann saw the footmen come out, supporting on either side the bowed form of the old woman in her sable cloak, and her youthful companion slip by after her, in her thin wrap, with flowers in

her hair. The carriage door slammed. The carriage rolled heavily over the loose snow. The doorman closed the front door. The windows went dark. Hermann began walking up and down in front of the deserted mansion. When he got to a street lamp he glanced at his watch—it was twenty minutes past eleven. He stood in the light of the lamp, his eyes fixed on the hands of his watch, waiting for the remaining minutes to pass. Precisely at half-past eleven he stepped on to the Countess's porch and into the brightly lit entrance. The doorman was not there. Hermann ran up the stairs, opened the door into the hall, and saw a serving-man asleep beneath a lamp, in an ancient, greasy arm-chair. Hermann passed him with a light, firm tread. The ball-room and drawing-room were dark. The lamp in the hall shed a dim light on them. Hermann entered the bedroom. A gilded lamp swung in front of an iconostasis filled with ancient icons. Arm-chairs upholstered in faded damask, and down-stuffed sofas with the gilt wearing off in patches, stood in mournful sym-

metry along the walls, which were hung with Chinese wallpaper. There were two portraits painted in Paris by Madame Lebrun on the walls. One was the likeness of a man of some forty years, rosy-cheeked and stout, in a bright-green uniform with a star on the breast; the other showed a young belle with an aquiline nose, in whose powdered locks, brushed up from the temples, was a rose. In every corner could be seen porcelain shepherdesses, clocks from the skilled hand of Leroy, ornamental boxes, tops, fans, and various toys invented for the amusement of ladies in the end of the previous century, along with Montgolfier's balloon, and Mesmer's magnetism. Hermann went behind the screen. There stood a small iron bedstead; on the right was the door of the study, on the left the door into the passage. Hermann opened it, and saw the narrow spiral staircase leading to the poor young lady's room. But he turned back and entered the dark study.

The hours passed slowly. All was quiet. The clock in the drawing-room struck mid-

night. Clocks in all the other rooms chimed in one after the other. And all was quiet again. Hermann stood leaning against the cold stove. He was quite calm; his heart pulsed regularly, like that of one who has resolved upon what is dangerous, but inevitable. The clocks struck one, and then two—and he heard the distant sound of carriage wheels. He was thrown into a state of agitation. The carriage drove up and came to a stop. He could hear the clatter of the steps being let down. There were sounds of bustle in the house. People came running, voices were heard, and the house lit up. Three elderly lady's maids hastened into the bedroom, and the Countess, more dead than alive, entered and sank into the high-backed arm-chair. Hermann peeped through a crack in the door. Lisaveta Ivanovna passed close to him. He could hear her hurried footsteps ascending her staircase. He felt something like a pang of remorse, but it died down at once. He stood as if turned to stone.

The Countess began undressing in front of the mirror. Her maids unpinned her rose-

trimmed cap, removed the powdered wig from her grey, closely cropped head. Pins fell from her in showers. The yellow dress embroidered in silver dropped to her swollen feet. Hermann was a witness of the horrid secrets of her toilet. At last the Countess was clad in nothing but a night-gown and night-cap—in this attire, more appropriate to her age, she was not so sinister and hideous.

Like all old people, the Countess suffered from insomnia. When her maids had undressed her she sat down near the window in the high-backed arm-chair and dismissed them. The candles were carried out, and once more the only light in the room came from the icon lamp. Her face a bilious yellow, her drooping lips twitching, the Countess swayed from left to right in her chair. Utter absence of thought could be seen in her dim eyes. Looking at her, one might have supposed that the terrible old woman swayed from side to side, not of her own accord, but under the influence of some concealed galvanic force.

Suddenly an indescribable change came over her death-like countenance. Her lips ceased their twitching, and a light came into her eyes. A strange man stood before the Countess.

"Do not be afraid, for God's sake, do not be afraid!" he was saying in low, clear tones. "I have no intention of harming you —I have come to beg a single favour of you."

The old woman gazed at him in silence, but seemed not to have heard him. Hermann, supposing her to be deaf, bent right over her ear and repeated his words. The old woman was as silent as ever.

"You can make me happy for life," continued Hermann, "and it will cost you nothing. I know that you are able to guess three cards to be played in succession...."

Hermann broke off. Evidently the Countess understood what was wanted of her, and was searching for words to answer him with.

"It was only a jest," she said at last. "I swear to you! It was a jest!"

"This is no jesting matter," replied Hermann sternly. "Remember Chaplitsky whom you helped to win back his losses."

The Countess was visibly embarrassed. Some powerful emotion showed itself on her face, but very soon she sank back into her former apathy.

"Can you name me these three infallible cards?" continued Hermann.

The Countess remained silent. Hermann continued:

"For whom are you treasuring your secret? For your grandchildren? They are rich, as it is; they do not understand the value of money. Your three cards will not help a spendthrift. He who allows a father's legacy to slip through his fingers will die in poverty, despite any diabolical efforts. I am no spendthrift. I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be wasted on me. Come, now! . . ."

He ceased speaking, and waited anxiously for her reply. The Countess remained silent. Hermann fell on his knees.

"If your heart ever knew the feeling of

love," he said, "if you remember its ecstasies, if you have only once smiled to hear the crying of a new-born son, if anything human ever beat in your bosom, I appeal to you as wife, mistress, mother, by all that is sacred in life, do not refuse my request! Reveal your secret to me! Perchance it may be linked with some terrible sin, with the forfeiture of eternal bliss, a pact with the devil. Bethink yourself that you are old, you have not long to live, I am ready to take your sins on myself. Only reveal to me your secret. Bethink yourself that the happiness of a human being is in your hands. That not only I, but my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will bless your memory, and hold it sacred. . . ."

The old woman answered not a word.

Hermann rose.

"Old witch!" he said, clenching his teeth. "Then I will compel you to answer me!"

With these words he drew a pistol from his pocket.

At the sight of the pistol the Countess again showed signs of powerful emotion.

She jerked back her head and raised her hand, as if to ward off a shot.... Then she fell against the back of her chair ... and remained motionless.

"Come, you are not a child!" said Hermann, taking her hand. "I ask you for the last time—do you intend to tell me what these three cards are? Yes or no?"

The Countess made no answer. Hermann saw that she was dead.

7 Mai 18 . .

Homme sans mœurs et sans religion.

CORRESPONDENCE

IV

LISAVETA IVANOVNA was seated in her room, still in her ball dress, absorbed in profound meditation. As soon as she got home she hastily dismissed her drowsy maid, who offered her services reluctantly, and said she would undress herself. Then she went up to her own room with a fluttering heart, hoping to find Hermann there, and desiring

not to find him. She saw at a glance that he was not there, and thanked her stars for the obstacle in the way of their interview. She sat down without taking off her clothes and began to go over in her mind all the circumstances which had carried her so far in such a short space of time. Three weeks had not yet elapsed since the day she had first seen the young man beneath her window—and she was already corresponding with him, while he had wrung from her the promise of a nocturnal interview. If she knew his name, it was only because some of his letters had been signed. She had never spoken to him, never heard his voice, never heard anything about him—till this very evening. And strange to say, at the ball, Tomsky, vexed with the youthful Princess Pauline***—for flirting with someone else for a change—wished to revenge himself and show his indifference. He invited Lisaveta Ivanovna to dance with him, and went through the endless mazes of the mazurka with her. He had jested the whole time about her partiality for engineers, assuring her

that he knew a great deal more than she could possibly imagine, and some of his jests so nearly hit the mark that Lisaveta Ivanovna could not help thinking, more than once, that he knew her secret.

"Who told you all this?" she asked him, laughing.

"A friend of a certain person whom you know," replied Tomsky. "A most remarkable man."

"And who is this remarkable person?"

"His name is Hermann."

Lisaveta Ivanovna made no reply, but her hands and feet turned cold as ice.

"This Hermann," continued Tomsky, "is a most romantic individual. He has the profile of a Napoleon, and the soul of a Mephistopheles. I believe he has at least three crimes on his conscience. How pale you are! . . ."

"My head aches. . . . What did that, what's his name—Hermann—tell you?"

"Hermann is greatly displeased with his friend. He says he would have acted quite differently, himself. . . . I'm inclined to

think that Hermann has an eye on you himself, for he listens with great interest to the enamoured exclamations of his friend."

"But where can he have seen me?"

"At church, perhaps, or out driving.... God knows—perhaps in your room, while you were asleep. Anything may be expected of him."

Three ladies came up to them with the question: "*oubli ou regret?*" and the conversation, of such agonizing interest for Lisaveta Ivanovna, had to be interrupted.

The lady whom Tomsky chose was the Princess*** herself. During one round of the ball-room and a turn in front of her chair they had come to an understanding, and by the time Tomsky got back to his place he was no longer interested either in Hermann or in Lisaveta Ivanovna. She was longing to revive the interrupted conversation; but the mazurka came to an end, and soon after the old Countess took her departure.

Tomsky's words had been nothing but ball-room small talk, but they had sunk deep into the soul of the romantic girl. The por-

trait sketched by Tomsky coincided with the image she had herself formed, and this type, which the latest novels have made a commonplace, at once alarmed and captivated her imagination. She sat with her bare arms folded, her head, with the flowers still in her hair, drooping over her half-exposed breast.... Suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She felt a profound thrill....

"Where have you been?" she asked in a frightened whisper.

"In the old Countess's bedroom," replied Hermann. "I've just come from her. The Countess is dead."

"Dear God! What d'you mean?"

"And it seems," continued Hermann, "that it was I who caused her death."

Lisaveta Ivanovna glanced at him, and Tomsky's words echoed in her heart: *That man has at least three crimes on his conscience.* Hermann seated himself on the window-sill next to her and told her all.

Lisaveta Ivanovna heard him with horror. And so it was not love that had inspired

all those passionate letters, those ardent requests, that audacious, stubborn pursuit! Money—that was what his soul thirsted after. It was not she who could quench his desires and make him happy. The poor companion had been nothing but the blind accomplice of a criminal, the murderer of her old benefactress. She wept bitterly, in her belated, anguished repentance. Hermann looked at her in silence—he, too, felt a pang, but it was not the poor girl's tears, nor the exquisite beauty of her grief which stirred his hard heart. He felt no remorse at the thought of the old woman who was dead. Only one thing appalled him—the irretrievable loss of the secret which he had hoped would enrich him.

"You are a monster," said Lisaveta Ivanovna at last.

"I did not desire her death," replied Hermann. "My pistol was not loaded."

They were both silent.

Day began to break. Lisaveta Ivanovna extinguished the dying candle—a pale light crept into the room. She dried her eyes,

which were red with weeping, and raised them to Hermann's face: he was sitting on the window-sill with his arms crossed, frowning ominously. In this pose he strikingly resembled a portrait of Napoleon. Even Lisaveta Ivanovna was impressed by the likeness.

"How are you to get out of the house?" she said, after a pause. "I had intended to take you by a concealed stairway, but we should have to go past her bedroom, and I am afraid."

"Tell me how I can find this concealed stairway. I will go."

Lisaveta Ivanovna rose, went to her chest of drawers and took out a key which she handed to Hermann, giving him full instructions. Hermann pressed her cold, passive hand, kissed the top of her bent head, and went away.

He descended the spiral staircase and once more entered the bedroom of the old Countess. The dead old woman sat there as if turned to stone; there was an expression of profound calm on her features. Hermann

stood before her, gazed long at her, as if desirous of confirming to himself the appalling truth. At last he went into the study, felt for the papered door in the wall, and began descending a dark staircase, a prey to the strangest sensations. By this very staircase, he told himself, sixty years ago into this very bedroom, at this very hour, in a long embroidered coat, his hair brushed *à l'oiseau royal*, his three-cornered hat pressed to his heart, may have stolen a young fortunate, now long mouldering in the grave, while the heart of his aged mistress had this day ceased to beat....

At the foot of the staircase Hermann found a door, which he unlocked with the same key, and emerged in a passage leading right through the house to the street.

*The late Baroness von V*** appeared*
to me in a dream tonight.
She was attired in white and said to me:
"Greetings, Mr. Privy Councillor."

SWEDENBORG

V

THREE DAYS AFTER the fatal night Hermann went to the *** monastery, where a service was to be held over the remains of the defunct Countess. While he felt no remorse he could not, however, quite silence the voice of conscience, which told him: it is you who murdered the old woman. He had little true faith, but many superstitious

beliefs. He believed that the dead Countess might have an injurious influence on his life—and resolved to attend her funeral in order to beg her forgiveness.

The church was full. Hermann could hardly push his way through the crowd of mourners. The coffin stood on a rich bier beneath a velvet pall. The dead woman lay with hands folded on her breast, clad in a lace cap and white satin dress. Around the coffin stood her household—the servants in black liveries, with crested ribbons on their shoulders, holding candles, the relatives—her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren—in deep mourning. No one wept; tears would have been *une affectation*. The Countess had been so old that her death caused no surprise to anyone, and her relatives had long regarded her as one who had outlived her time. A youthful priest preached the funeral sermon. He described in simple and touching phrases the peaceful end of the pious lady, for whom the long years had been a calm affecting preparation for a Christian death. "The

angel of death," said the preacher, "found her awake, in the midst of holy meditations, awaiting the midnight bridegroom." The service was accomplished with mournful propriety. The relatives went first to bid farewell to the body. After them, the innumerable guests, who had come to pay obeisance to her who had so long been a participator in their vain festivities, moved towards the coffin. Then came the members of the household. And finally there approached an ancient serving-maid, who was the same age as her mistress. Two youthful serving-maids held her up beneath her arms. She had not the strength to bow down to the ground, and, alone of them all, shed a few tears as she kissed the cold hand of her late mistress. After her, Hermann ventured to approach the coffin. He bowed to the ground, prostrating himself for a few moments on the cold paving-stones, strewn with branches of fir. Then he rose, as white as the corpse itself, ascended the steps of the bier, and bent down.... It seemed to him that the dead woman looked at him

quizzically, and winked. Retreating hastily, he missed the step, and fell flat on the ground. He was picked up. At that very moment Lisaveta Ivanovna was carried out to the porch of the church in a swoon. This incident disturbed for a few moments the solemnity of the gloomy ritual. A hollow murmur arose from the crowd and a lean courtier, a near relation to the deceased, whispered in the ear of an Englishman standing beside him that the young officer was her natural son, to which the Englishman replied with a dry: "Oh?"

Hermann was in a state of excessive agitation the whole day. He dined in a lonely tavern and, contrary to his custom, drank a great deal, in the hope of drowning his anxiety. But the wine only inflamed his imagination still more. As soon as he got home he threw himself down on his bed in his clothes, and fell sound asleep.

When he woke up it was night; the moon lit up his room. He glanced at his watch—it was a quarter to three. He no longer want-

ed to sleep, and sat up in bed, thinking about the old Countess's funeral.

Just then someone in the street looked at him through the window, and immediately stepped back. Hermann paid no attention to this. A minute later he heard the front door being opened. He thought it was his orderly, drunk as usual, returning from his nocturnal revelries. But he heard unfamiliar footsteps: someone approached with softly shuffling slippers. The door of his room opened and a woman in a white dress entered. Hermann took her for his old nurse and wondered what could have brought her there at such a time. But the white woman glided forward, and was suddenly quite close to him—and Hermann recognized the Countess.

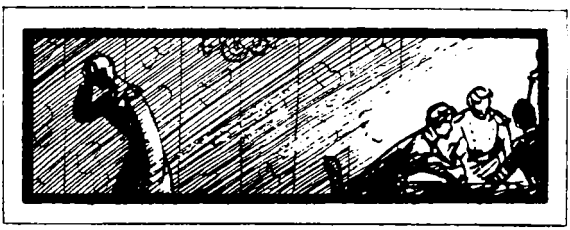
"I have come to you against my will," she said in firm tones. "I have been bidden to fulfil your request. A Three, a Seven and an Ace in succession are your winning cards, but only on condition that you do not stake more than one card a day, and after

that never again play your whole life long. I forgive you my death, on condition that you marry my protégée Lisaveta Ivanovna. . . ."

With these words she turned softly towards the door, and shuffled out. Hermann heard the door in the porch bang, and saw someone peer through the window into his room again.

It was a long time before he could recover his senses. He went into the next room. The orderly was asleep on the floor. Hermann roused him with great difficulty. He was drunk as usual, and Hermann could get nothing out of him. The door to the porch was bolted. Hermann went back to his room, lit a candle and wrote an account of the vision he had seen.

"*Attendez!*"
"How dare you tell me *attendez?*"
"'I said *attendez vous*,' Your Excellency."



VI

TWO FIXED IDEAS cannot exist simultaneously in our moral nature, any more than two bodies can occupy one and the same place in the physical world. The Three, the Seven, the Ace soon blurred the image of the dead old woman in Hermann's imagination. The Three, the Seven,

the Ace were continually in his mind, and hovered on his lips. When he caught sight of a young girl he said: "How graceful she is—a regular Three of Hearts!" When asked what the time was, he answered five minutes to the Seven. Every paunchy man he came across reminded him of the Ace. The Three, the Seven, the Ace haunted his dreams, assuming all sorts of forms. The Three blossomed out before his eyes in the image of an enormous flower, the Seven was represented by Gothic portals, the Ace by a huge spider. All his thoughts were merged in a single one—to profit by the secret which had cost him so dear. He began thinking of retiring and travelling. He longed to wrench the treasure from enchanted Fortune in the public gambling salons of Paris. Chance relieved him of these cares.

At that time there was a society of wealthy gamblers in Moscow presided over by the renowned Chekalinsky, whose whole life had been spent playing cards, and who had accumulated millions, winning prom-

isory notes, and losing ready cash. His experience and wisdom had earned him the confidence of his comrades, and his hospitality, famous chef, kindliness and cheerfulness had gained him the esteem of the public. He came to Petersburg. The young men flocked to him, neglecting balls for card-playing and preferring the seductions of faro to the sweets of courting. Narumov brought Hermann to his house.

They passed through a suite of resplendent rooms lined with respectful menservants. A few generals and privy councillors were playing whist. Young men sprawled on the damask sofas, eating ices and smoking pipes. The host was keeping the bank at a long table in the drawing-room, around which crowded some twenty gamblers. He was a man of about sixty of the most genteel appearance. His hair was a silvery grey; his plump, fresh-coloured countenance expressed good humour; his eyes shone, lit up by a continual smile. Narumov introduced Hermann to him. Chekalinsky pressed his hand cordially, asked him not

to stand upon ceremony, and went on playing.

The game was a long one. There were over thirty cards on the table. Chekalinsky paused after every deal in order to give the players time to look over their hands, jotted down losses, lent a courteous ear to all demands, and still more courteously smoothed back the corner of a card bent over by a careless hand. At last the game came to an end. Chekalinsky shuffled the cards and prepared to begin another.

"I would like to stake a card, if you please," said Hermann, stretching out his hand from behind a fat gentleman at the card-table. Chekalinsky smiled and bowed silently, in token of submissive consent. Narumov laughingly congratulated Hermann on the breaking of his long fast, and wished him good luck.

"I am ready!" said Hermann, writing the sum in chalk above his card.

"What's that?" asked the holder of the bank, screwing up his eyes. "I am not sure that I read your sum right."

"Forty-seven thousand," replied Hermann.

At the sound of these words all heads were turned immediately, and all eyes were fixed on Hermann.

"He's gone mad," thought Narumov.

"Allow me to remark," said Chekalinsky, with his habitual smile, "that your stake is high. No one has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five *simple* here."

"Well?" replied Hermann. "Will you play?"

Chekalinsky bowed with his usual air of submission.

"I only wished to inform you," he said, "that, since I am honoured with the confidence of my friends, I am obliged to play for cash only. For my part, I am, of course, willing to rely on your word, but for form's sake and to avoid misunderstanding I would ask you to place your money on the table."

Hermann took a bank-note from his pocket and handed it to Chekalinsky, who,

glancing rapidly at it, placed it on Hermann's card.

He began dealing. On the right lay a nine, on the left a three.

"Mine!" said Hermann, showing his card.

A murmur rose from the players. Chekalinsky frowned, but the smile returned immediately to his face.

"Shall I give it you now?" he asked Hermann.

"If it's no trouble."

Chekalinsky drew a bundle of bank-notes from his pocket, and counted out the required sum. Hermann took his winnings and retired from the table. Narumov was almost beside himself. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and went home.

On the evening of the next day he repaired to Chekalinsky's again. The host was dealing. Hermann went up to the table; the other players immediately made room for him. Chekalinsky bowed to him urbanely.

Hermann waited for a fresh deal, and laid down a card, on which he placed his forty-seven thousand, and his winnings of the previous night.

Chekalinsky began dealing. A knave was on the right, a seven on the left.

Hermann turned up a seven.

Everyone gasped. Chekalinsky was visibly disconcerted. He counted out ninety-four thousand in notes and handed them to Hermann. Hermann received them with the utmost sang-froid and immediately withdrew.

On the following evening Hermann was again at the table. Everyone was expecting him. The generals and privy councillors abandoned their rubber of whist to watch the unusual play. The young officers sprang up from the sofas. All the menservants were gathered in the drawing-room. Everyone pressed round Hermann. The other players did not put down their stakes, but waited eagerly to see how the game would go. Hermann stood at the table, ready to play against the pale, but ever-smiling

Chekalinsky. Each unsealed a new pack of cards. Chekalinsky shuffled. Hermann cut and laid down his card, covering it with a heap of bank-notes. It was like a duel. Profound silence reigned in the room.

Chekalinsky began to deal with an unsteady hand. On the right he turned up a queen, on the left, an ace.

"The ace wins," said Hermann, and showed his card.

"Your queen is covered," said Chekalinsky urbanely.

Hermann started: it was true—instead of an ace there lay the Queen of Spades. He could hardly believe his eyes, and wondered how he could have made such a blunder.

And all of a sudden it seemed to him that the Queen of Spades was narrowing her eyes and laughing at him. He was struck by an extraordinary likeness.

"The old woman!" he cried in horror.

Chekalinsky drew his winnings towards

him. Hermann stood motionless. When he went away from the table everyone started talking loudly. "What a game!" exclaimed the players. Chekalinsky again shuffled the cards: the game went on as usual.

CONCLUSION

HERMANN HAS gone mad. He is in ward Number 17 of the Obukhov Hospital, and never answers when he is spoken to, only muttering over and over again with extraordinary rapidity: "Three, seven, ace . . . three, seven, queen!. . ."

Lisaveta Ivanovna married a very well-bred young man; he works in a government office and is the possessor of a considerable fortune. He is the son of the old Countess's former steward. Lisaveta Ivanovna is bringing up an impoverished female relative.

Tomsky has been promoted to a captaincy and is going to marry the Princess Pauline.

1834

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

THE QUEEN OF SPADES is considered one of the best novelle known to world literature. In this work Pushkin carried the ability to write with simplicity, brevity and clarity to the point of perfection.

Though of slight volume this tale is fraught with profound social content. Its hero, a young officer in an engineer regiment, with "the profile of a Napoleon and the soul of a Mephistopheles," is a man of "violent passions and fiery imagination." Ambitious, and a gambler at heart, he is reserved, calculating and thrifty almost to miserliness. The main purpose of his life is—money. For the sake of wealth Hermann is capable of anything—of seducing a young girl whom he does not really love, of becoming the lover of an old woman of eighty—even of crime.